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Planning Department

MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Board **Date:** October 26, 2004

From: Roland Bartl, AICP, Town Planner

Subject: State of the Town Meeting and Planning Board Work Agenda

You have seen in your weekend package that the Selectmen have called for a State of the Town Meeting on December 1, 2004. The agenda will focus on three areas:

- 1) Affordable Housing progress and the requirements/effects of Chapter 40B
- 2) Property Taxes, Potential Overrides and resultant Levels of School & Municipal Services
- 3) Solid Waste Disposal after the September 2005 termination of the NESWC contract

This prompted me to review the Planning Board's work agenda as decided in early June of this year. Here is the excerpt from the 6/8/04 minutes:

Discussion

Planning Board members narrowed down what they would like to focus on over the next year: Top Priorities: **The Master Plan; NPDES; Implementing the EO-418 Housing Plan.** Mr. Bartl suggested preparing a scope for the Master Plan, perhaps with public participation, before seeking capital funding from Town Meeting. He noted that the Town has severe fiscal constraints and many competing funding requests. Once funded, the master plan effort would be a three-year project, or so. Other items on the to do list were: Reviewing any needed updates or items for improvements in the Subdivision Rules and Regulations; TDR; a two-year planning effort for Kelly's Corner; continuation of Public Outreach; re-evaluating parking requirements.

I must report with regret that we have not made progress on any of these things. Lack of time and staffing resources combined with the need to address "demands of the day" prevented us from starting any of the more long-term planning initiatives. I suppose, one could say that the Planning Department is understaffed to perform the work that the Town's citizen's and Boards would like it to do. However, with continually shrinking financial support to the Town (as opposed to the public schools) increased staffing level in the Planning Department does not appear likely soon.

In light of this state of affairs, I propose a re-focus of efforts in the following order:

1. **Implementing the EO-418 Housing Plan.** The Town has a fresh study/plan and should follow it up with implementation of its recommendations while there is momentum. Energy and desire from the ACHC to do this is guaranteed, as will be their frustration if the Planning Board should delay this effort. The subject has risen in importance to be on the 1st State of the Town Meeting agenda. Working with the ACHC, and other Town Boards as necessary, the Planning Board should try to develop a program, including zoning change proposals, for affordable housing to be presented for

adoption at the next Town Meeting when zoning is on the agenda. To be honest, I am doubtful that we could be ready for the Annual Town Meeting in April, but it should nevertheless be priority No.1.

2. **NPDES.** Important in part because there is a Federal/State mandate for action. However, it is my opinion that this effort should be kept to the absolute minimum necessary to keep the Town in compliance.
3. **Master Plan.** Not unimportant, but if life in the Planning Department continues as is it has in the last year, we simply cannot bite it off. The Selectmen have pegged master plan funding for FY '08. If that holds, the earliest we can start spending money would be July 2007. I propose that the pre-master plan effort that is contemplated in the June 8 minutes be postponed until 2006.

In addition, the Board wanted to improve inter-Board communication and continue its public education efforts. These need Board members' initiative.

Heads-up on a "demand of the day" matter that is likely to come barreling to the forefront, scheduled or not: Life after NESWC discussions have potential implications on matters affecting planning and zoning. Attend the State of Town Meeting where this will be a subject. Otherwise stay tuned and perhaps get involved.

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